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ABSTRACT

This report documents the conduct and results of activities to evaluate the first offering of The Consumer Experience to adult learners through the State University of Nebraska (SUN). A project of the University of Nebraska, SUN is a nontraditional, open learning program designed to extend postsecondary educational opportunities to persons who find it difficult to access traditional campus-based programs. As of Spring 1975, SUN was the only operational delivery system in the University of Mid-America consortium. The Consumer Experience is a course designed to assist the learner in understanding and solving many common consumer problems. It consists of 30 half-hour television programs, two texts, a student learning guide, and a newspaper lesson overview, appearing each Sunday throughout the course in "The Omaha World-Herald." The television component carries the major portion of the instructional content for the course. This report presents a brief overview of several factors: (1) a profile of enrolled learners; (2) course completion and learner examination performance; (3) learners' evaluation of the course; and (4) general conclusions and implications, although relationships among the data are not shown. (LBH)

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THE CONSUMER EXPERIENCE
(First Offering)

Course Evaluation Report

Office of
Research and Planning

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University of Mid-America

September, 1975

HE 010 416

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COURSE EVALUATION REPORT
THE CONSUMER EXPERIENCE--FIRST OFFERING

September 1975

This report documents the conduct and results of activities to evaluate the first offering of The Consumer Experience to adult learners through the State University of Nebraska (SUN). SUN, a project of the University of Nebraska, is a nontraditional, open learning program designed to extend postsecondary educational opportunities to persons who find it difficult to access traditional, campus-based programs. The University of Mid-America (UMA) is a regional consortium of the Universities of Nebraska, Iowa State, Missouri, Kansas and Kansas State, and serves these institutions through three sets of activities: the acquisition and development of courseware for delivery in open learning programs; the planning, development and coordination of systems for the delivery of open learning; and, research and evaluation which helps inform the development of open learning programs. As of Spring 1975, SUN was the only operational delivery system in the UMA consortium.

The Consumer Experience is a course designed to assist the learner in understanding and solving many common consumer problems. It was designed and produced by two faculty members at the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay. UMA acquired the course and offered it through SUN intact, as developed at Green Bay, with the addition of a UMA-produced newspaper component.

The course consists of thirty half-hour television programs, two texts, a student learning guide, and a newspaper lesson overview, appearing each Sunday throughout the course in the "Omaha World-Herald." In The Consumer Experience, the television component carries the major portion of the instructional content for the course. The textbooks primarily provide supplementary material and the Student Learning Guide is simply an outline of the television content. The course

examinations were formulated largely from the material covered in the television programs.

The course began officially on March 4, 1975, with the first television broadcast. Two different television programs were aired over the ETV network twice each week, one on Tuesday and repeated on Saturday, the other on Thursday and Saturday. Video tapes of each program were also available at the SUN learning centers. Academic credit for the first offering of The Consumer Experience is being offered by the Department of Education and Family Resources at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

SUN has provided a support system of administrators, faculty and learning center staff to assist learners in the accomplishment of educational goals. There are four learning centers in Nebraska, one each in Omaha, Lincoln, Kearney, and Scottsbluff, which provide learners with course testing services, videotapes of the television programs for initial viewing or review purposes, supplementary reading material, and educational counseling services. In addition, students can access SUN administration and course faculty through a toll-free telephone line.

Three equally weighted tests were administered during the course, after the tenth, twentieth, and thirtieth television programs. The cumulative score from all three examinations determined the course grade. Students took the exams at a local public library or a nearby SUN learning center.

The remainder of this report presents a brief overview of several factors relating to the first offering of The Consumer Experience, including 1) a profile of enrolled learners; 2) course completion and learner examination performance; 3) learners' evaluation of The Consumer Experience course, and 4) general conclusions and implications to be drawn from an investigation of the above listed factors.

For two reasons, this report will not attempt to show relationships among the various data gathered. The computer capability for readily exploring such relationships is not operational within UMA at this time. In addition, to date, the relatively small number of The Consumer Experience enrollees (75) has yielded summary data in numbers inadequate for correlational analysis.

A Profile of Enrolled Learners

Seventy-nine (79) learners initially enrolled in the first offering of The Consumer Experience. Three (3) learners withdrew from the course during the first eight week refund period and one (1) person officially withdrew after that time. The following information collected on the course registration form describes the remaining 75 enrollees:

- 84% enrolled for credit.
- the median age was 31, with 50% between 25 and 35 years.
- 71% were female.
- 41% identified themselves as homemakers.
- 5% identified themselves as students.
- 76% had had previous college experience, and 27% previous SUN experience.
- 43% were from the Omaha learning center area, 23% from the Lincoln learning center area, 23% from the Kearney learning center area, and 12% from the Scottsbluff learning center area.
- All reported that they could reach a SUN learning center.

Thirty-nine (52%) learners completed a Student Information Questionnaire (SIQ) sent to all enrolled learners upon receipt of their registration forms at SUN. The following data are reported on the basis of this return:

- 74% were married, 23% were single, and 3% were widowed, separated or divorced.
- 53% had mostly young children, 18% had mostly grown children, and 29% had no children.

- 8% had completed some graduate study, 21% were college graduates, 49% had one to three years of college, 10% had a trade or business school education, and 13% had a high school education.
- 56% had participated in a formal educational experience within the past five years.
- 26% lived on a farm or ranch; 8% lived in towns of under 2,000 people; 18% lived in towns of between 2,000 and 10,000; 18% lived in towns of between 10,000 and 50,000; 31% lived in cities of 50,000 or more.

In summary, those enrollees in The Consumer Experience who returned SIQ information tended to be females between 25 and 35 years of age, married with young children. They were distributed across the state in approximately the distribution of the population and within access of a SUN learning center. Most were well educated, with previous college experience, had participated in a formal educational experience within the last five years, and were enrolled in this course for college credit.

Course Completion and Learner Performance

Course examinations were available to be taken by students at any time, upon request. The majority of the students, however, took each of the three course examinations some time after the tenth telecast in each third of the course. The last television program was aired on June 28, 1975, officially ending the first offering of The Consumer Experience.

By September 5, 1975, 44 (70%) of the 63 learners enrolled for credit had completed the course, i.e., had taken all three course examinations; 5 (8%) had completed two of the three exams; 6 (10%) had completed one exam; and of 5 (8%) who had taken no exams, four could not be located by course faculty and one had switched from credit to non-credit status.

Of the 12 non-credit enrollees, one had taken one exam, one two exams, and one all three exams. It is not known to what extent the other nine non-credit enrollees completed the course since they did not choose to take the course examinations.

The pattern of test-taking behavior varied considerably among those who took the course for credit. There appears to be no positive relationship between the speed with which learners took exams following the last television broadcast of the section of study and the grade they received.

The total possible score for all three exams was 150, with each exam consisting of 50 multiple choice items. The average total score was 125 (B), with a range from 99 (D) to 142 (A). Table 1 contains the distribution of exam score data for the 44 course completers.

Table 1. Exam Score Data

Exam Material Covered Through:	Possible Score	Actual Range	Median	Mean	s.d.
TV PROGRAM #10	50	37-48	44	45	3
TV PROGRAM #20	50	26-49	41	41	6
TV PROGRAM #30	50	23-47	41	40	5
TOTAL	150	99-142	127	123	10

Evaluation of the course in progress

Upon completion of each cluster of ten television broadcasts, learners received a three-page intermediate evaluation form. A postage-paid, self-addressed return envelope accompanied each form. By September 5, 1975, 40 (53%) had returned the first form, covering all study for television programs #1 through #10; 24 (32%) had returned the form covering all study for programs

#11 through #20, and 19 (25%) had returned the form covering study for programs #21 through #30. Twelve (16%) learners returned all three intermediate evaluation forms and 47 (63%) returned at least one form. At this time, there does not appear to be any relationship between examination grades and return of evaluation forms.

Responses to selected items from the three intermediate evaluation forms can be found in Appendix A. In general, it is difficult to draw comparisons among the three ten-program clusters of the course due to the small numbers of returns, particularly for the second and third clusters of work, and the lack of direct comparison questions in the evaluation forms. The following statements, therefore, are tentative in nature.

The material covered in the first third of the course, while rated easiest and most clearly presented, was given a somewhat less positive evaluation in terms of the importance of the information covered. Conversely, the second third of the course was rated most difficult by the responding learners but was considered the most interesting and productive section of the course. Likewise, the students gave the major learning resources in this third of the course their highest "helpfulness" ratings.

As regards individual course components, the television programs, Student Learning Guide, and the Text PLAID were consistently regarded as very helpful by the learners. The newspaper articles were generally considered helpful, but later evaluation data indicated that learners felt the articles contained too little information. Although the first ten television programs received a more critical appraisal than did the remaining 20, with the exception of #14, "Recreation and Leisure," it is not evident whether this was due to the quality of the programs or to the differences among each group of evaluating respondents. It is possible that the differential rate of the self-selected returns for each third of the course reflects the attrition of the more dissatisfied and the persistence of the more accepting.

End-of-course evaluation

Following the completion of the third and final examination, and prior to receiving a course grade, learners received an end-of-course evaluation form. This was a three-page questionnaire, the first page of which sought general course appraisal, and the last two pages of which attempted to generate more component-specific data. Thirty-one (70%) of the learners who completed the course by September 5, 1975, returned end-of-course evaluation forms.

In summary, the majority of the 31 learners who returned evaluation forms found the course very acceptable, with few complaints. Ninety-seven percent (97%) felt they would recommend the course to a friend. The course examinations were regarded as fair, about right in difficulty level, and approximately the right length. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the learners were satisfied with the number of tests while the 23% who were not would have preferred more exams. Also, 39% of the 31 respondents indicated that they would have liked a means of having course work other than the multiple choice exams contribute to their grade. About 45% of the 31 learners reported having some difficulty in keeping up with the television broadcasts.

Only 8 (26%) learners reported having felt the need for course-related assistance from SUN during the course and seven of these attempted to and did obtain the help they needed. Reports throughout the course indicated that relatively few learners made use of the learning centers (27%) and toll free telephone line (37%). Two factors were mentioned by 25% of the learners as presenting course related difficulty: domestic interruptions and demands and a lack of self-discipline in getting down to regular work.

The supplementary end-of-course form tapped the learners' opinions of the various formats and techniques used in The Consumer Experience television program.

Overall, responses to all elements were generally positive, with some dissatisfaction expressed with the supplementary film scenes (30%) and the integration of the television component with the other course components (20%). Appendix B summarizes all of the television program format data as well as the remaining post-course evaluation information obtained from learners.

Summary and Conclusions

Due to the relatively small number of responses to the evaluation questionnaires, definitive conclusions would be unwarranted and inappropriate at this time. The following statements are indicative of tentative findings from the evaluation of the first offering of The Consumer Experience and are submitted as hypotheses to be tested in subsequent offerings of the course.

1. Those course units which are somewhat difficult for the learners are valued more highly than those which learners consider somewhat too easy.

2. Learners rate the television programs, the Student Learning Guide, and the text PLAID, in that order, as the most helpful learning resources in the course.

3. Few learners use the learning centers or toll-free telephone line as an educational support system during the course.

4. Most learners read the course-related newspaper articles during the course but find them only moderately helpful; nearly half of the learners feel the articles contain too little useful information.

5. A majority of the learners find the current television broadcast schedule inconvenient but make time to view the programs.

6. About 70% of all learners who enroll in the course for credit will complete the course within 10 weeks of the last television broadcast, if they are not given the option of switching to non-credit status prior to that time.

7. Learners find The Consumer Experience a worthwhile course and one they would recommend to their friends.

8. The Consumer Experience attracts a smaller, better educated group of enrollees than do traditional, academic disciplines.

It is difficult to draw conclusions or base recommendations on the data collected during the first offering of The Consumer Experience. This is due, in part, to the issue raised earlier concerning both the number and the self-selected nature of the learner evaluators who contributed results cited in this report. In addition, learner evaluation is only one source of data from which decisions about courseware and courses are generated. While students may regard the content imparted by the course and its specific course components as interesting and important, it is ultimately the input of content specialists which should determine the adequacy and relevance of this aspect of The Consumer Experience.

As regards the appeal of the course to the learners, however, The Consumer Experience appears to be well accepted by those responding. The completion rate among The Consumer Experience original for-credit enrollees is considerably higher than that for the first offering of either Accounting I or Psychology. This may be due to a number of factors. The initial enrollment in this course was only 19% of that for Accounting I, and only 28% of that for Psychology, i.e., a smaller, possibly more focused group. Secondly, this course attracted learners who were better educated and temporally closer to their most recent formal learning experience than either of the courses offered in the fall of 1974. Thirdly, the SUN faculty person affiliated with The Consumer Experience did not offer learners enrolled for credit the option of switching to non-credit status at any point in the course, although she contacted all but four learners to encourage their progress in the course at least once, and often more than once, between March 4, 1975, and September 5, 1975. (Several unsuccessful attempts were made to contact the remaining four enrollees by both telephone and letter.) Fourthly, the course may not present the academic and learning difficulties experienced in a more rigorous academic discipline.

Courses targeted at special interest groups, such as the Learning Disabilities course offered through SUN in Fall 1975 can be expected to attract relatively larger enrollments than a course such as The Consumer Experience which responds to an implicitly rather than an explicitly formulated need. Moreover, it appears that a topical course like The Consumer Experience which is not targeted at any specific interest group, may attract a smaller, more narrowly defined group of enrollees than traditional academic subject areas. Also, the enrollees attracted by such courses, due to a number of factors, will be more likely to complete the course in which they are enrolled. This hypothesis should be explored further in subsequent offerings of this course and of new courses in terms of its possible impact on course development and acquisition procedures.

Previous course reports for the first offerings of Psychology (July 1975) and Accounting I (July 1975) raised methodological and course-related issues to be investigated in the future. Many of the questions generated by those reports apply likewise to The Consumer Experience, for example: (a) Why don't enrollees make more use of the SUN learning centers and toll-free telephone line? How can this usage be increased? (b) What content information could the learners have used but did not obtain? (c) How can the self-selection data gathering issue best be handled? What are the demographic and performance related correlates of self-selected response? (d) What properties are the scales on the evaluation instruments measuring, and how reliably are they doing so? Evaluation of the second offering of The Consumer Experience, and the other seven course offerings in Fall 1975 should help address some of these issues.

APPENDIX A

Learner Responses to a Sample of
The Consumer Experience Intermediate Evaluation Form Items

			Response Summary		
			Form #1 (N=40)	Form #2 (N=24)	Form #3 (N=19)
		Response Categories	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
1.	Overall I would rate this part of the course as:	Excellent	9(22.5)	8(33.3)	7(36.8)
		Very Good	20(50.0)	10(41.7)	8(42.1)
		Good	8(20.0)	5(20.8)	4(21.1)
		Fair	2(05.0)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)
		Poor	1(02.5)	1(04.2)	0(00.0)
2.	The material in this part of the course was, overall:	Exceptionally Clear	9(22.5)	3(12.5)	3(15.8)
		Very Clear	25(62.5)	10(41.7)	7(36.8)
		Reasonably Clear	6(15.0)	11(45.8)	9(47.4)
		Unclear	0(00.0)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)
		Very Unclear	0(00.0)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)
3.	The material in this part of the course was, overall:	Very Difficult	0(00.0)	0(00.0)	1(05.3)
		Somewhat Difficult	5(12.5)	13(54.2)	11(57.9)
		Just Right	18(45.0)	10(41.7)	6(31.6)
		Somewhat Easy	13(32.5)	1(04.2)	1(05.3)
		Very Easy	4(10.0)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)
4.	With respect to the TV broadcast schedule, the overall pacing of this part of the course was:	Too Fast	0(00.0)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)
		Somewhat Fast	7(17.9)	6(25.0)	6(31.6)
		Just Right	27(69.2)	16(66.7)	12(63.2)
		Somewhat Slow	3(07.7)	1(04.2)	1(05.3)
		Too Slow	2(05.1)	1(04.2)	0(00.0)
5.	I spent the following average time, including the TV program, on each of the included lessons:	Less than 1 hour	9(22.5)	2(08.3)	2(10.5)
		1-3 hours	23(57.5)	17(70.8)	11(57.9)
		4-6 hours	7(17.5)	5(20.8)	5(26.3)
		7-9 hours	0(00.0)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)
		10-12 hours	1(02.5)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)
		Over 12 hours	0(00.0)	0(00.0)	1(05.3)
6.	The total amount of work required for this part of the course is:	Considerably Too Much	0(00.0)	0(00.0)	1(05.6)
		Slightly Too Much	1(02.6)	2(08.7)	4(22.2)
		Just Right	30(76.9)	19(82.6)	12(66.7)
		Slightly Too Little	5(12.8)	2(08.7)	1(05.6)
		Considerably Too Little	3(07.7)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)

		Response Summary		
	Response Categories	Form #1 (N=40) N (%)	Form #2 (N=24) N (%)	Form #3 (N=19) N (%)
7. I thought the material in this part of the course was:	Very Interesting	25(62.5)	16(66.7)	10(52.6)
	Fairly Interesting	11(27.5)	6(25.0)	9(47.4)
	Neutral	1(02.5)	1(04.2)	0(00.0)
	Not Very Interesting	3(07.5)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)
	Very Uninteresting	0(00.0)	1(04.2)	0(00.0)
8. I believe that from this part of the course I learned:	A Great Deal	18(45.0)	17(70.8)	10(52.6)
	Some Things	19(47.5)	6(25.0)	9(47.4)
	Not Very Much	2(05.0)	1(04.2)	0(00.0)
	Almost Nothing	1(02.5)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)
9. I believe that what I learned from this part of the course was:	Very Important	13(33.3)	16(66.7)	12(63.2)
	Important	22(56.4)	8(33.3)	7(36.8)
	Generally Unimportant	4(10.3)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)
	Almost Entirely Unimportant	0(00.0)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)

For ease of reporting, the response summary for the following question combines the results from the three Intermediate Evaluation Forms.

10. How helpful did you find each of the resources provided?

	Response Summary (N=83)*			
Resource	Very Helpful N (%)	Helpful N (%)	Not Helpful N (%)	Did Not Use N (%)
a. Newspaper Articles	13(17.1)	48(63.2)	14(18.2)	1(01.3)
b. Television Programs	60(73.2)	22(26.8)	0(00.0)	0(00.0)
c. Buy It Right! (Text)	23(27.7)	56(67.5)	4(04.8)	0(00.0)
d. PLAID (Text)	40(50.0)	35(43.8)	5(06.2)	0(00.0)
e. Student Learning Guide	51(66.2)	24(31.2)	2(02.6)	0(00.0)
f. Learning Center	10(43.5)	10(43.5)	1(04.3)	2(08.7)
g. Toll-Free Telephone	10(37.0)	15(55.6)	2(07.4)	1(03.7)

*Note that the total number of responses does not always equal 83, but ranges between 76 and 83 for Resources a through e. For Resource f, N=23, and for Resource g, N=28. Since the learners could indicate if they "did not use" each resource, the reason for the large number of nonresponses to Resources f and g is not readily apparent. Learners may have resisted responding to the "did not use" category so as to avoid indicating a well-informed, intentional rejection of the merits of these resources. The possibility that the learners were not adequately apprised of the existence and function of these two resources should be explored.

APPENDIX B

Learner Responses to a Sample of
The Consumer Experience End-of-Course Evaluation Form Items
(N=31)

	Response Categories	N	Percent
1. Overall, how would you rate this course?	Excellent	15	(48.4)
	Good	11	(35.5)
	Fair	4	(12.9)
	Poor	0	(00.0)
	Unacceptable	1	(03.2)
2. How interesting was this course to you?	Very Interesting	19	(61.3)
	Fairly Interesting	10	(32.3)
	Neutral	2	(06.5)
	Rather Uninteresting	0	(00.0)
	Very Uninteresting	0	(00.0)
3. Overall how difficult was the content of this course for you?	Very Difficult	0	(00.0)
	Fairly Difficult	9	(30.0)
	Neutral	9	(30.0)
	Fairly Easy	10	(33.3)
	Very Easy	2	(06.7)
4. Is it likely that you would enroll in another SUN course sometime?	Yes	27	(90.0)
	No	3	(10.0)

APPENDIX B (cont.)

Learner Responses to a Sample of The Consumer Experience
Supplementary End-of-Course Evaluation Form Items
(N=31)

1. In general, did any of the following learning aids contain 1) too much content per lesson, 2) content that was too difficult, or 3) too little useful information? (Check as many as apply.)

	Too Much Content N (%)	Too Difficult N (%)	Too Little Useful Information N (%)
Newspaper	1(03.2)	1(03.2)	14(45.2)
Television	4(12.9)	1(03.2)	4(12.9)
Text-PLAID	9(29.0)	3(09.7)	4(12.9)
Text-Buy It Right!	2(06.5)	1(03.2)	7(22.6)
Student Learning Guide	2(06.5)	1(03.2)	2(06.5)

2. On the average, how would you rate the following aspects of the television portion of the course?

	Excellent N (%)	Good N (%)	Fair N (%)	Poor N (%)
Amount of information	17(54.8)	11(35.5)	2(06.5)	1(03.2)
Usefulness of information	17(54.8)	10(32.3)	3(09.7)	1(03.2)
Length of time between each telecast of new material	9(30.0)	20(66.7)	1(03.3)	0(00.0)
The way television tied in with other course aids	14(45.2)	11(35.5)	4(12.9)	2(06.5)
David Ward as host	19(61.3)	8(25.8)	4(12.9)	0(00.0)
Mary Ellen Kolka as host	16(51.6)	11(35.5)	4(12.9)	0(00.0)

3. We are also interested in how much you liked the various types of formats used in the television portion of the course. Please indicate your rating of each below.

	Excellent N (%)	Good N (%)	Fair N (%)	Poor N (%)
Lecture with host on screen	14(45.2)	13(41.9)	4(12.9)	0(00.0)
Show and tell with products	12(38.7)	14(45.2)	5(16.1)	0(00.0)
Supplementary film scenes	11(36.7)	10(33.3)	7(23.3)	2(06.7)
Interviews with "experts"	16(51.6)	11(35.5)	1(03.2)	3(09.7)
Host talks while some other picture is on the screen	11(35.5)	10(58.1)	1(03.2)	1(03.2)

4. Which one learning aid (if any) helped most to organize your progress through the course?

	N	Percent
Newspaper	1	(03.3)
Television	13	(43.3)
Text-PLAID	4	(13.3)
Text-Buy It Right!	0	(00.0)
Student Learning Guide	12	(40.0)
None	0	(00.0)